Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

colours themselves of the leaves, flowers, &c. constitute their outline. This want of a terminal or marginal line to leaves and flowers, of a different colour from other parts of these portions of the plant, is in exact conformity to nature, which has given them no such outline, and it must be because we have determined what plants are, from drawings, and not from nature, if we consider this naturalness of Dr. Bigelow's figures a defect instead of a beauty. The accuracy with which this mode of engraving may be made to imitate different parts of a plant, is very apparent in the plates of *Ictodes fœtidus* and *Panax quinquefolium* in the third number.

The mechanical execution of other parts of this work deserves notice and commendation. The type is remarkable for its clearness and beauty, and no pains have been spared to render the work elegant and correct.

Regarded as scientific publications, the second and third numbers of the American Medical Botany sustain the character of the first. The interest of the author remains unabated, and in the numbers under notice, he furnishes novel and valuable information about the medicinal properties of a number of our plants.

ART. III.—*Samor, Lord of the Bright City, an heroic poem, by the Rev. H. H. Milman, M. A. Fellow of Brazen-nose College, Oxford, and Vicar of St. Mary's, Reading.* New York, C. Wiley & Co. 1818.

IT is only in an age like the present that such poets as Mr. Milman are produced. Place genius where you will, in an age barbarous or civilized, aided by the discoveries of others or without them, and it will distinguish itself in some form or other; it weaves its web from materials within itself and needs but little external aid to effect its purposes. But it is only when civilization has advanced, the means of education been generally diffused, and a taste for reading cultivated, that a new source of pleasure, from a chaste and classical style, and smooth and flowing versification, is opened; that the labour of the mere scholar is appreciated and his productions valued. Poetry may thus be considered either as the work of genius, self dependent, availing itself of these advantages as auxiliaries, or of taste and learning, using

them as principals. The poets of the latter class, it is true, cannot thrill us with horror or make us wild with joy, but they can keep our feelings in gentle and delightful play, can fortify virtuous resolutions and implant holy affections; immortality may be beyond their grasp, but they can gain some reputation and do some good for the age in which they live.

In this class of scholar poets, the author of the work before us takes his place, and he has laboured diligently to obtain it. One of the greatest faults of his poem arises hence. We see the hard working of powers tasked to their utmost, through the whole of it. There is but little free sporting of fancy or feeling; few light and beautiful sketches, but much cold, hard drawing. He sometimes gives us, it is true, a strikingly beautiful and living description of natural scenery, but when he comes to the emotions of the soul, his language is tame and bombastic, or like them, is perplexed and intricate. To describe the soul tossed by the storm of passion or swelling with the grandeur of its emotions is the province of genius, and poets like Mr. Milman should be careful of intruding. It is his misfortune that he has not rightly estimated his strength and the nature of his talents; that he will not be contented to write well. He has adopted the rule of Tacitus to direct his efforts, but forgets that the faults are equal, of soaring above his subject or grovelling beneath it; and often, after toiling up a long and dizzy height, he vanishes into air, like the Saxon deities he describes, out of our reach and sight.

Another fault, which springs naturally from the difficulty of composing, so evident throughout the whole production, is the want of connexion in the general course of the work and even in single sentences. Parts, which should have been cemented together closely, are tied with a pack-thread or left loose and jarring against each other. Without the least preparation, we are hurried from one passage to another, with which it is entirely unconnected or most inartificially joined. Six or seven lines introduced into sixty or seventy different places would improve the poem wonderfully.

But a charge which falls more heavily than either of these is the paucity of moral remark, of general conclusions, of any thing that we can carry away with us for the regulation of conduct or as food for reflection. We rise from reading the work, as from hearing music, the impression of which

lasts only during the performance; there is nothing that remains with us; no enlargement of views or elevation of thought; not one feeling altered or confirmed. If it were not for evidences of something better in another production, (his tragedy of Fazio,) we should say there was something radically wrong in this; a faint perception of moral beauty or a mind which could not turn aside from relating a story to apply its moral.

There is little that any of the personages say or do which lends any light to the development of their characters. The poet says such an one is brave and merciful or cruel, and he seems to consider this as sufficient; and we conceive that there is here another very serious fault. It is impossible that we should feel strongly interested in characters, of whom we know so little. He has, indeed, told us more about Samor than about the others, but he is so far removed from human weakness and above human excellence, that we cannot easily sympathize with him. We should have our hopes and fears excited, there should be something in himself to conquer, some lingering trace of earthly feeling, at least, in the hero of a poem, to excite our sympathy or to serve any purpose of morality as a model. There is an exception to the above remark in the character of Rowena. It is well conceived and described. Her aspiring and determined spirit forms a fine contrast to the exquisitely beautiful and delicate frame it inhabits. With strong passions and boundless ambition, she is alternately the slave and the mistress of her feelings; and the woman who now 'stoops to be a queen,' at another time stands trembling, weak and irresolute before the object of her love.

The story does not admit of any description of domestic life, and we think it unfortunate for Mr. Milman that it does not. Want of feeling is not one in the number of his numerous deficiencies as a poet; and we must look to feeling, rather than to imagination, for the description of the heart filling sensations of the family fireside.

The poem opens with an eulogy on the author's country, and in the very first sentence we meet with that indistinctness, which from bad arrangement of words and the very worst punctuation we have ever met with, in almost every page, compels us to read some sentence two or three times in order to understand it. In the structure of the verse, there

is a close imitation of Milton; it is, however, more involved, and crowded with vague epithets.

> 'Land of my birth, oh Britain! and my love,
> Whose air I breathe, whose earth I tread, whose tongue
> My song would speak its strong and solemn tones
> Most proud, if I abase not.'

Hardly have we turned the leaf when we come to the following.

> 'Forth from the gates of Troynovant hath past
> King Vortigern; the Princes of the Isle
> Around him; on the walls, for then (though now
> Scorn bounds her mighty wilderness of streets,
> And in magnificence of multitude
> Spread, and illimitable grandeur,) walls
> With jealous circuit and embattled range
> Girt Britain's narrow capital.'

It subtracts very much from the interest we might otherwise feel, to meet continually with such passages as these. In reading a poem, we wish to indulge our feelings or to elevate our thoughts, not to exercise our powers of research. The highest success of poetry and perhaps the test of its excellence, is to give an impetus and direction to the imagination, rather than to lead it; to make us feel satisfied and proud of ourselves, to set the mind in a glow from the voluntary exertion of its powers. But there is some difference between opening the door for the reader to wander in the gardens of imagination, and setting him at work to find it.

Vortigern, Sovereign of Britain, who had invited the Saxon princes, Hengist and Horsa, to repel the invasion of the Caledonians, comes forth from the gates of Troynovant, (the ancient name of London,) to welcome them, just returned from victory. At the feast which is made to celebrate it, Rowena, the daughter of Hengist, a being

> 'too proud
> For less than absolute command—too soft
> For aught but gentle amorous thought,'

glides into the hall to pledge the health of Vortigern; for

> 'in our ancient Saxon faith,
> Ill bodes the joyless feast, where maiden's lips
> Pledge not the wassail goblet.'

Awaking from the trance in which his senses were fixed, the king learns that she is the daughter of Hengist. A secret and animated conversation ensues, which ends in Vortigern's taking the crown from his head and placing it on that of Hengist.

> 'to Kent's high king
> A health, a health to Vortigern's fair bride,
> The golden haired Rowena,'

is proclaimed by the king and echoed by the Saxons. Samor, the Lord of the Bright City, (the ancient British name for Gloucester,) refuses to acknowledge his title and denies the right of Vortigern to bestow it. He quits the hall and is followed by all the noblest of the British princes. In a subsequent conference with Vortigern, just as he promises Samor to cast the Saxon off, Rowena passes by. She is beautifully described.

> 'Have ye a sense, ye gales, a conscious joy
> In beauty, that with such an artful touch
> And light ye float about her garment folds,
> Displaying what is exquisite displayed,
> And thinly scattering the light veil where'er
> Its shadowing may enhance the grace
> * * * * * that thus ye love
> To lose yourselves about her, and expire
> Upon her shape or snow white robes?'
> * * * * * * *
> 'Alone she came, alone she went not on.'

The British princes, disgusted with the infatuation of Vortigern, elect another sovereign of Britain.

The third book opens with the meeting of the Saxon princes to deliberate on their future course. They are joined by Caswallon, a traitorous British prince, who proposes to Hengist to unite with him for the conquest of Britain, and after its achievement, 'on some lone eminence,' to decide by single combat who should reap the undivided fruits of victory. The result of the conference is that Hengist and Caswallon cross the ocean to demand of the Saxon deities the fate which awaits their enterprise. In describing their voyage, Mr. Milman gives us the following passage. After several attempts, we abandoned, in despair, all hopes of understanding it.

> 'From dizzy notions of infinity,
> Vague sense of ever during sights and sounds,
> Inactive through the body, the free spirit,
> Vagrant along the illimitable void,
> Perils uncouth and rich uncertainties
> Ranges in restless round, plucks treasures rare,
> That gem the caverns of the hoary deep,' &c.

One would think that he intended to give his readers a pretty definite idea of 'dizzy notions' by such an exemplification of them. In several other passages, as well as in this, he seems to have strung words together, trusting to chance that some meaning might creep in among them. It is strange that, with the talents he must be allowed to possess, he should write such stuff as this.

The Aurora Borealis is beautifully described, and once more makes us wish that Mr. Milman would exert his powers on some subject, where our admiration would not so soon be succeeded by weariness or a harsher feeling. If he would but select one which did not so often carry him beyond his depth, some one connected with our every day experiences, which would require no highly wrought description of feeling, we are confident that he might produce something more worthy of him than 'Samor.'

> 'Twas midnight, but a rich unnatural dawn
> Sheets the fixed artic heaven; forth springs an arch,
> O'erspanning with a crystal pathway pure
> The starry sky, as though for Gods to march,
> With show of heavenly warfare daunting earth,
> To that wild revel of the northern clouds;
> That now with broad and bannery light distinct,
> Stream in their restless wavings to and fro,
> While the sea billows gleam them mellower back;
> Anon like slender lances bright upstart,
> And clash and cross with hurtle and with flash,
> Tilt in their airy tournament.'

Arriving at their port of destination, they mount the chariot of the oracle, drawn by reindeer, and after journeying a long time over wastes of snow,

> 'Tremblingly flashed the inconstant meteor light,
> Showing thin forms, like virgins of this earth,
> Save that all signs of human joy or grief,

The flush of passion, smile or tear, had seemed,
On the fixed brightness of each dazzling cheek,
Strange and unnatural.'

They pass from consulting these deities, as men usually do from asking advice, 'each of fixed fate nought heeding but what fed his fierce desires.' Hengist collects all the nations of the North, and with an immense fleet, they set sail for England. On their arrival, they find Horsa driven from the kingdom of Kent to the island of Thanet. They make proposals of peace to the British princes, assembled to oppose their landing, which are accepted, notwithstanding the remonstrances of Samor, and a feast is made on the plain of Ambri to celebrate and confirm it. The description of the procession and feast is one of the few instances in which Mr. Milman attempts any thing highly wrought without running into extravagance.

'The banqueters, like Gods at nectar feast,
Sit sumptuous and pavilioned; all glad tones
From trembling string or ravishing breath or voice
In clouds of harmony melt up to heaven;
O'erwhelming splendor all, of sight and sound;
One rich oppression of eye, ear and mind.'

A signal is given and the British princes are all massacred, with the exception of Samor, who escapes. He hastens to his own Bright City of the Vales, but the enemy had been there before him. He finds his daughter just expiring, and learns from her, that his wife and children had been murdered by the Saxons. He has now nothing on earth to live for, but vengeance and the hope of restoring freedom to his country. He wanders over Britain.

'Samor! the cities hear thy lonely voice,
Thy lonely tread is in the quiet vale,
Thy lonely arm, amid his deep trenched camp,
The Saxon hears, upon some crashing helm
Breaking in thunder and in death.'

Rowena, already enamoured of his fame, meets him as she is sailing towards her castle, and on promise of protection he accompanies her, in the hope of rousing Vortigern. The unsuccessful interview between them is well drawn. As he is about to quit the castle, Rowena makes a passionate declar-

ation of her love, which he firmly and almost loathingly rejects. The description of the state of her mind, after he had left the castle, is admirable, and gives a more decided indication of talent, than any one passage in the poem.

> 'Slowly retired the queen; she called around
> Her slaves, her handmaids; arrogant, their looks
> Seemed to confront her; eyes, aye wont to shrink
> Before her gaze, now seemed to pry and pierce
> Her deepest soul's recesses, and she blushed,
> Even in her plenitude of scorn. They stood
> Trembling before her wayward mood, yet seemed
> Mockeries in theirs; solitude she sought,
> Yet solitude found none; things senseless took
> Stern cognisance of all her acts, her thoughts;
> Eyes hung the empty walls, weak, laughing sounds
> Of triumph o'er her shame pervaded wide
> The tranquil air; all, with herself at league,
> Shook scorns upon herself.'

In his wanderings, Samor meets with Merlin, 'Snowdon's dark Prophet,' and the events of English history pass in prospective view before them. Alfred is thus ridiculously described.

> 'Holy as new anointed Christian Priest,
> Valiant as warrior burnished for the fight,
> Fond and extatic, as love dreaming bard,
> Solemn and wise, as old philosopher,
> Stately, as king-born lion in the wood.'

Charles the first, as a king,

> 'That with misguided sceptre, strove to check
> The powerful stream of freedom.'

At the side of this stream of freedom, flowing through Britain,

> 'a tree sprung out,
> With ever mounting height, and amplitude
> Aye spreading;'
> 'And from that mystic river, Freedom, flowed
> A moisture like the sap of life, that fed
> And fertilized the spacious Tree.'

'I saw the nations graft their wasted trunks
From those broad boughs of beauty and of strength,
And dip their drained urns in that sacred stream.'

It is well enough to write such a description of one's country, which none but countrymen are to read; but for strangers to see one nation set forth as possessed of every excellence, and all others as drawing from her whatever of good they may have, produces a reaction of feeling that will deny even what should be granted.

Once, and once only, does Samor venture near the scene of his former happiness; he passes thence to the plain of Ambri where 'murther quaffed his glut' from blood of British princes. We would refer the reader to these as among the happiest specimens of Mr. Milman's poetry. He will meet here with an unexpectedly natural description of feeling; not, as elsewhere, with turgid declamation and laborious searching for high sounding and striking epithets.

But the destiny of Samor is about to change, and the hour of retribution to the Saxon is at hand. Leagued with the sons of Constantine, Samor raises an army and excites the whole country to rebellion. Mr. Milman thus describes the effects of the burst of freedom which electrified the Island.

'In all the Isle was flat subjection tame,
In all the Isle, hath Freedom reared her, plumed
With terror, sandaled with restlessness:
Her march like brazen chariots, or the tramp
Of horsemen in a rocky glen; and in her rear
Dead men in grisly heaps, dead Saxons strewn
Upon their trampled white horse banners.'

The armies meet and the conflict is begun by the child, Arthur, whom, the poet just before told us, his mother had 'held up on high.'

'a single steed
Burst furious from the British line, with flight
That had a tread of air, and not of earth.
Fierce and direct he whirled to the hot charge
His youthful rider. Upright sate the Boy
Arthur.'

After a long and not very animated battle, Horsa is slain, and Hengist is taken prisoner and executed. His daughter,

Rowena, having in vain interceded for his pardon, remains to witness his execution and dies in beholding it.

Such is the story, and excepting the total want of interest in the relation, it seems rather the account of a novel than a poem. Mr. Milman is not master of his subject, but is constantly obliged to conform to it. He has enough of heart, but not enough of mind for it; this constantly breaks and checks that stream of feeling which would flow so beautifully in a humbler channel. Tameness or extravagance are the faults to which it naturally leads him. His cast is always beyond the mark or short of it; he never 'rings the stake.' He seems to be constantly spurring on his powers to the task; and if they sometimes seem animated, it is rather the plunging of restlessness than the free spring of activity and vigour. There is a great deal of good versification, but very little of good poetry. He seems to have some of the accomplishments of a poet, but to want many of the essentials. This gives such a mixed character to his work, that it is difficult to pass a general opinion upon it. It can easily be proved by extracts, to be very good or singularly ridiculous. Its faults are those which spring of course from the selection of a subject above his powers,—indistinctness, tameness, bombast, evident hard labour, great inequality of execution, and a want of nature throughout. We are not willing to take this poem as a specimen of Mr. Milman's powers. The want of interest, arising from the unskilful direction of talent rather than from the want of it, is the great fault of 'Samor.' The subject does not admit of the exercise of those powers which Mr. Milman can exercise to most advantage. A humbler theme would suit him better. The description of natural scenery and domestic character would tame his soaring spirit and bring him to meet us on equal ground. He must meet us, for he has not the all-powerful energy of genius to transport us from the world of our own thoughts and feelings to one of his creation.